

Lesson Plan

Big Idea

Government decisions have an impact on citizens. It is the purpose of our government “to elevate the condition of men, to lift artificial burdens from all shoulders and to give everyone an unfettered start and a fair chance in the race of life,” said President Abraham Lincoln on July 4, 1861. When Congress passed the Homestead Act in 1862, people were able to start their lives over with little debt. This included the Nebraska Territory. In fact, the very first homesteader to file a claim under the Homestead Act was Daniel Freeman near Beatrice, Nebraska, on January 1, 1863. Nebraska Territory became the State of Nebraska on March 1, 1867, just a little over four years later.

Lesson Overview

The lesson features:

- Teaching poster of James Penney’s murals located in the Capitol’s Vestibule depicting Nebraska homesteaders
- Information about what it took to become a homesteader
- The opportunity for students to present information in a non-fiction (reporter point of view) and historical fiction (reader’s theater) style.

Purpose

The James Penney murals in the vestibule of our state capitol show “The Homesteaders’ Campfire,” “The First Furrow,” and “The House Raising” honoring our ancestors who came to Nebraska to build a new life for their families.

Essential Questions

1. Why would people participate in the Homestead Act?
2. What did it take to own your own land in Nebraska Territory in 1862?
3. What challenges did the homesteaders face on the prairie?
4. How did the Homestead Act change the course of history and settlement of Nebraska?

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

1. identify government actions that lead to people settling the west
2. demonstrate the process a person went through to apply for and obtain a homestead under the Homestead Act
3. note the connection between James Penney’s drawings and his murals at our state capitol
4. identify the purpose of James Penney’s murals in our capitol building

Connection to Standards

NE Social Studies Standards	NE Language Arts Standards	NE Fine Arts Standards
<p>SS 4.3.3.d Describe how humans have adapted to Nebraska's physical environment and use available natural resources.</p> <p>SS 4.4.1 Investigate patterns of continuity and change over time in Nebraska.</p> <p>SS 4.4.1.a Analyze the chronology of key state and/or regional events and communicate their impact on the past, present, and future.</p> <p>SS 4.4.3 Analyze past and current events throughout Nebraska history.</p> <p>SS 4.4.3.b Identify key events in American history that shaped or were shaped by Nebraskans.</p>	<p>LA4.1.6.p Compare and contrast the text of a story, drama, or poem and a visual or oral presentation of the text.</p> <p>LA4.3.1 Students will develop, apply, and refine speaking skills and strategies to communicate key ideas in a variety of situations.</p> <p>LA4.3.1.b Demonstrate appropriate speaking techniques</p> <p>LA4.3.2.a Demonstrate active and attentive listening skills</p> <p>LA4.3.3.a Demonstrate appropriate social etiquette and apply social cues when communicating.</p>	<p>FA5.5.2.a Demonstrate expressive reading using vocal variety.</p> <p>FA5.5.2.d Present a short script with narration and dialogue.</p> <p>FA5.5.3.a Demonstrate respect for self and others in dramatic activities.</p>

WHAT YOU NEED

SESSION 1: James Penney Murals - 20 minutes

Students explore the images on the poster of the homesteaders and the story that the artist James Penney tells in his murals.

1.1 Teaching Poster: Print tabloid size (11 x 17) if possible or project on screen and discuss. May also be printed legal size (8.5 x 14).

1.2 Discussion:

- View the work of art on the poster and/or in the virtual tour to identify some of the rules that are depicted in the Penney murals.
- Learn about James Penney the artist and then study his sketches of horses. Then compare the sketches to the painted mural images of horses. What is similar? What is different?
- Why is the theme of homesteading important to showcase in our state capitol?

SESSION 2: The Homestead Act - 60 minutes - 2 sessions

Students read about the Homestead Act to learn who participated in this call for free land, the challenges the homesteaders faced, the process of proving up the land and filing to get free land, and how this changed our state.

Read Homestead Information in two groups and then share with each other in two different styles:

2.1 Activity: News Reporter (non-fiction): Share facts by creating a presentation of the map, and bulleted points chosen by the group.

2.2 Activity: Reader's Theater (historical fiction): "This Land is Our Land" by Cindy Johnson. Create a little drama about homesteading inspired by the James Penney murals.

2.3 Discussion: Students learn from each other as they present. Students will consider how the presentations reflect what they have learned about the Homestead Act and also note any discrepancies. Students will identify that one is non-fiction and the other historical fiction.

SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW

SESSION 3.1: DISCUSSION

Students discuss as a class using the following prompts:

- What kind of person would you need to be in order to be a successful homesteader and why?
- How did the Homestead Act change the course of history and settlement of Nebraska in your opinion?
- If you were going to homestead, what features would you look for in the land?